the concerns of Monterey Park, CA, on the placement of cleanup facilities.

In fact, I was the board member who made the motion to place the southern parcel of OII on the national priorities list.

Against the wishes of the board, the California Health Department, and the citizens of Monterey Park, however, EPA also included the northern parcel as part of the site.

This was done despite the fact that the northern parcel did not qualify for NPL listing by itself and EPA had failed to justify its inclusion.

The disregard I mentioned was first displayed with the placement of a leacheate treatment plant in the middle of the relatively contamination-free northern parcel.

Despite numerous allegations that the leacheate facility is a white elephant, the EPA now wants to place a thermal destruction facility in this same northern parcel.

To make matters worse, this portion of the site has excellent redevelopment opportunities.

Unfortunately, the placement of this facility at the proposed EPA location would negatively affect the value of the parcel and drastically alter the city's future development plans.

The original version of this legislation was not worded to accomplish a responsive attitude from EPA nor did it reflect our intention which was to make sure the best solution to a problem EPA region IX created was reached, both for the environment and the community of Monterey Park.

However, H.R. 2583 reemphasizes the true nature of the bill—one of compromise.

My legislation would block funds for the construction and operation of a thermal destruction facility unless the city and EPA agree upon its location somewhere on the northern parcel that still will allow for the highest and best use of the property in conjunction with the intent of the Brownfields Act.

Throughout my involvement with this site, I have always desired a quick and efficient cleanup.

This can be done while still allowing the economic interests of Monterey Park to be fulfilled, especially when other placement locations are readily available.

The reason there has sometimes been extreme criticism of the EPA are cases such as this, where the EPA has been totalitarian in its dealing with local citizens and their local government.

I urge all Members to join me in opposition to this obvious affront to local interests and inappropriate Federal intrusion in the long-term economic viability of this city.

HAPPY 40TH BIRTHDAY LYLE ROLOFSON

HON. GLENN POSHARD

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, November 8, 1995

Mr. POSHARD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Mr. Lyle Rolofson on his 40th birthday. Lyle is a self-proclaimed policeman, junior fireman, and gadfly who has quite an enviable fan club in the town of Argenta, IL. Lyle is a fixture throughout the community where he never misses village meetings, and is always eager to assist his friends and neighbors.

In honor of Lyle's 40th birthday the town of Argenta decided to throw him a spectacular birthday celebration. Argenta's mayor, Nelson Jackson, even declared September 28, 1995 Lyle Rolofson Day in Argenta. Lyle was presented with a commemorative plaque which read:

The Village of Argenta is proud to declare September 28, 1995 as Lyle Rolofson Day for being the ''Good Citizen'' that he is to the people of Argenta. We love you, Lyle.

I am delighted to join with the village of Argenta in recognizing Lyle for his dedication to the community he calls home. Mr. Speaker, Lyle Rolofson believes in the value of community involvement, and I am proud to represent this outstanding individual in Congress.

FREEDOM'S DRUMMER: ROSA PARKS

HON. JOHN CONYERS, JR.

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, November 8, 1995

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, for several decades now, I have had the privilege of knowing a woman who set great wheels of social change in motion. Forty years ago this year, she gave birth not to one life but to many lives by igniting the energies of the civil rights movement. From a single, simple act of courage, she showed those suffering in the Nation how to move from hope to determination. That woman was Rosa Parks, and she accomplished all this by refusing to sit in the back of the bus. The article I am entering into the RECORD today from the Washington Post Magazine tells her story, and I believe it will move you the way it did me:

[From the Washington Post Magazine Oct. 8, 1995]

A PERSON WHO WANTED TO BE FREE

(By Walt Harrington)

Bus No. 5726: A shell, really, a decaying hulk with its glass eyes missing from their windshield sockets, red rust marching like a conquering fungus from its roof, down and around bullet-pocket windows to its faded green and yellow sides. An era's relic, stored in the wind, rain and stultifying summer sun on the vo-tech school's back lot, stored on the chance that the people of Montgomery, Alabama, will someday reach a place in mind and heart where they will find, who knows, $100,000 to refurbish it as a lesson from that night 40 years ago, December 1, 1955, when a city bus driver asked a prim black woman to leave her window seat so that a white man could sit, and she uttered an almost inaudible, ''No.'' It was an ordinary evening, Christmas lights flickering, people hurrying home past the banner ''Peace on Earth, Goodwill to Men.'' Even Rosa Parks, 42 then, was thinking about all she had to do in the next few days. But at the instant she refused to move, as Eldridge Cleaver once said, ''Somewhere in the universe, a gear in the machinery shifted.'' The wonder of it: Imagine the chances that so precise a moment of reckoning would be encoded in our collective consciousness. Stop time: Look back, look ahead, jot a note, nothing will ever be the same. The stopwatch of history has been pressed now, at this instant of resonance, this flash of leavening light.

Bus No. 5726: It is not *the* bus—*the* bus is long lost. After all, that December 1 trip seemed like just another run on the Cleveland Avenue line. Business as usual, but this artifact from that time, most of its seats now gone, is still a narrow passageway from then to now, a time-tunnel. Scores of wasps inhabit the place, a few flying in and out of the missing windows, most huddling and pulsing en masse on their nests. A headlight that will never again illuminate languishes on a mantel behind the long rear seat, which was always occupied by ''coloreds.'' The dust on that seat and others, that dust on the floor, is so thick that the interior is like a sidewalk caked with dry, powdery dirt after a flood. On the filthy floor is a red plastic bucket marked by the moment the white paint was last poured from it. Small hinges and a batch of tiny screws are strewn haphazardly about, as if a conjurer had, with the flick of a wrist, tossed them there like metal bones in an effort to read some meaning into it all, discern the mystery.

The smells are of age and dust and raging summer heat, the lessons are of change and intransigence so great it is hard now even to comprehend. The dirty air tightens the lungs, like breathing gravel. A seat is torn in a cut-away display; old wood, followed by coarse dark fiber, followed by soft white stuffing—the hidden layers, like those of America, finally laid bare.

''A gear in the machinery shifted.''

Yes, but why?

Why Montgomery? Why 1955?

Most of all, why Rosa Parks?

''Yeah, I know'd her,'' says A.T. Boswell, an erect 79-year-old man poised in front of his house, a hardscrabble house with a tin roof and tilting chimney that sits beneath a huge sheltering water oak in Pine Level, Ala., precisely 20 miles southeast of Montgomery on Route 231. It was a long distance for Rosa Parks and America to travel. In bib overalls, Mr. Boswell stands with his giant hands planted powerfully on his hips, his eyes clear, his long face narrow at the chin and wide at the forehead a triangle standing on its tip. A thin scar, evidence of a bout with a barbed wire fence decades ago, runs the length of his left forearm. His voice, from deep in his chest, seems to roil his words before they arrive, creating a dialect almost too foreign for a stranger.

She's related to my people,'' he says of Rosa Parks.

''Who was her mama?'' asks Julia Boswell, Mr. Boswell's wife of 52 years. she has joined him in the sunny yard, her hands clasped casually behind her back. At 69, she is short, round and relaxed to Mr. Boswell's tall, gaunt and formal. She wears a denim hat with a round brim that casts a shadow over her face, a blue-and-white house dress and a white apron. Beyond the house, her laundry is drying on the line. Mr. Boswell rumbles a response.

''Oh, Leona!'' Mrs. Boswell interprets. ''Leona and cousin Fannie were sisters. Well, his grandmother was they aunt. She was Leona Edwards' aunt. That was Rosa Parks' mother.''

''She was raised on the farm,'' says Mr. Boswell.

Rosa Parks was born in Tuskegee, Ala., in 1913. By the time she was a toddler, the marriage of her mother and father was pretty much over and Leona had moved back to Pine Level to live with her parents. Leona wasn't your average country woman. She was a schoolteacher who had attended the private Payne University in Selma at a time when public education for most of Alabama's black children ended in the sixth grade. Unlike nearly all black families near Pine Level, Leona's family didn't crop for shares. The family owned 12 acres of land that one of Rosa's great-grandfathers, a Scotch-Irish indentured servant, had bought after the Civil War and another six acres one of her grandmothers had inherited from the family of a

white girl she'd once cared for. In that time and place, the family of Rosa Parks was comfortable.

While many blacks then felt compelled to smile and shuffle around whites, such behavior was banned in her home. Rosa's maternal grandfather, the son of a white plantation owner and a seamstress house slave, had been mistreated terribly as a boy by a plantation overseer and he hated whites. He wouldn't let Rosa and her brother, Sylvester, play with them. Rosa once stayed up late with him as he sat resolutely, shotgun at the ready, while the Ku Klux Klan rode the countryside. He told her he's shoot the first Klansman through the door. Her grandfather was so light-skinned that he could easily pass for white, and he took joy in reaching out and shaking the hands of white strangers, calling them by their first names and introducing himself by his last name, dangerous violations of racist protocol at the time.

Young Rosa took her cues from her grandfather and stood up to white children who tried to bully her, although her grandmother warned that she'd get herself lynched someday. That Rosa had white ancestors on her mother's side and her father's side made the hard line between black and white seem even more ludicrous. As a girl, she secretly admired a dark-skinned Pine Level man who always refused to work for whites. Years later, one of the traits that attracted her to her future husband, Raymond, was that he had faced down white bullies and even helped raise money for the defense of the Scottsboro Boys, nine black Alabama youths convicted in 1931 on flimsy evidence for supposedly raping two white woman.

Rosa was a quiet, polite girl, petite and delicate. She played tag, hide-and-seek and Rise Sally Rise with the other kids but wasn't much of a rough-houser, played a lousy game of baseball. She had a sweet voice, loved to sing gospel in church, read the Bible to her grandmother after her eyes failed. Rosa's mother expected her children to excel in school. Rotha Boswell, a cousin of Rosa's who is now 81, even remembers a time Leona spanked Rosa's brother for getting lower marks than Rotha, who always thought Leona believed her children were better than everybody else's.

The strength and confidence of Rosa Parks and her family don't exactly jibe with the Rosa Parks myth—the myth that emerged from her refusal to move to the back of the bus in 1955, the myth that served the needs of the emergent civil rights movement and the myth that spoke so eloquently to black and white America: She was a poor, simple seamstress, Rosa Parks, humble and gentle, no rabble-rouser, a meek Negro woman, exhausted from a hard day's work, a woman who had been abused and humiliated by segregation one time too many, who without forethought chose to sit her ground. In truth, Rosa Parks was far more and far less than the mythology that engulfed her and that became the mobilizing metaphor of the Montgomery bus boycott, which lasted 381 days, raised the unknown Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. to international prominence and helped launch the modern civil rights movement.

Rosa Parks was not a simple woman. She wasn't meek. She was no more tired that day than usual. She had forethought aplenty. She didn't start the Montgomery bus boycott or the civil rights movement, neither of which burst forth from any single symbolic act. Forty years later, the defiance of Rosa Parks and the success of the boycott are enshrined in mystery and myth that obscure a deeper truth that is even richer, grander and more heroic. ''I know you won't write this,'' says Aldon Morris, sociologist and author of Origins of the Civil Rights Movement, ''but what Rosa Parks did is really the least significant part of the story. She refused to give up her seat and was arrested. I'm not even completely comfortable with deflating the myth. What I'm trying to say is we take that action, elevate it to epic proportions, but all the things that happened so she could become epic, we drop by the wayside * * * That she was just a sweet lady who was tired is the myth * * * The real story of Montgomery is that real people with frailties made change.

''That's what the magic is.''

Back in her front yard, Mrs. Boswell waves her hand in the air to stop the conversation, walks toward the porch to fetch her purse and says, ''I'm gonna take you to someone else's house.'' No place is more than a few minutes away in Pine Level, but the trip detours to the Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church on old Route 231, where the Boswells, Rosa Parks and just about every black resident of Pine Level have always gone to church. The original frame church, where Rosa Parks's uncle was the pastor, is gone, replaced with a utilitarian cinder block church, stark white.

The church is locked and she and her husband walk through the shady graveyard north of the church. They look for stone markers with the names of Mrs. Park's forebears, but find none. ''We didn't have markers then,'' says Mrs. Boswell, her purse slung over her left shoulder and tucked neatly under her arm. ''A lot ain't got no markers now. They just buried in the dirt. Then forgot 'em and buried somebody else on top of 'em. That's the way it be . . . I got a grandmother and grandfather out here and I don't know where they at. Since my mother passed, I don't know where they at.'' If Mrs. Boswell's mother, who died in 1958, were alive today, she'd think the change in race relations since 1955 was a miracle. ''She wouldn't a believed it,'' Mrs. Boswell says with finality. After a pause, she says, ''I wouldn't a believed it either.'' She, too, believes it was a miracle.

''White men here,'' Mrs. Boswell says, as she walks from grave to grave, ''they kilt an innocent bystander boy, buried right down there.'' She points to a corner of the graveyard. She figures it was in the '30s. ''His last name was Palmer, Otis Palmer, or something. He's probably in one a them that ain't got no stone.'' A white gang was searching for a black they believed had killed a white man. ''And this boy was out there some kinda way and got kilt. I imagine they mighta thought he was the black man did it, you know? They just shot 'im . . . I know the day. I was a kid then myself.''

At the nearby home of their friends, Mr. Boswell walks past the little trailer where they live, past Black Boy, the frail old dog sleeping at the steps, and out to the place where Eugene Percival is sitting in a rusty metal chair on pale dirt that is packed as hard as concrete. He, too, wears bib overalls. He is 85 years old: ''I tell ya when I was born, ought 9.'' For a moment, the old men talk to each other in a dialect almost too foreign for a stranger.

''Rosa Parks, my dad's her uncle.'' Mr. Percival finally says, bobbing his head, his right leg crossed at the knee over his left, his posture that of a much younger man. ''Oh, she was *mean*, mean as could be.'' He leans forward, laughs at his own teasing, and says seriously. ''She was a good woman. And still good, ain't she?''

From the trailer, Mr. Percival's sister-in-law, Ina Mae Gray, 92 years old, is making her way slowly and painfully across the pale dirt. She's a large woman with a bandanna wrapped around her head and another bandanna tied western-style around her neck. She, too, sits in a metal chair. ''Arthritis,'' she says, pulling up her long dress to her knees, running her hands gently down over her calves and then stopping to massage the bridges of her feet. She glances up askance at the white stranger and flashes a wary smile: ''You're not gonna put me in jail, are ya? I don't wanta see the jail, noooo!'' Mrs. Gray, too, remembers Rosa Parks. ''She was a good child, go to the field and hoe and plow. Pickin' cotton . . . And anything else you could raise to eat . . . I know'd her mama. What's her mama's name?''

''Leona,'' says Mr. Boswell.

''I heared that 'bout the bus,'' says Mrs. Gray. ''She was tryin' to get us a livin', I reckon.'' And suddenly, Mrs. Gray is angry, her voice rising. ''Let us have som'in' like them . . . Wooo, man, man! I had a hard time, hell, try to eat and couldn't eat. Had to eat water and bread and all kinda mess.'' Her face is contorted now and she is fighting back tears, her voice trembling. ''They was over us, they might beat our ass and go to cussin'.'' How is she supposed to love white people? Mrs. Gray asks. ''Man, I could cry! Right now! The way they done us. Let's call it. Us didn't have nothin'.''

''Hard times!'' Mr. Percival says.

Mrs. Gray gets wary again: ''Don't put me in jail, mister.''

From the trailer, Mrs. Boswell and Mr. Percival's wife, Nettie Mae, who is 81, come out to join the conservation. Mrs. Percival says she wasn't surprised when Rosa Parks got arrested. On any given day, because of the way it was, any black person could've snapped, met their limit and gone off, boom!

''They treated ya like slaves!'' says Mrs. Boswell.

''I coulda did it,'' Mrs. Percival says, her eyes wide and intense.

Everyone nods in agreement.

Mrs. Boswell: ''It's over with now.''

Mr. Boswell: ''Time and God changed that.''

Cloverdale is a beautiful Montgomery neighborhood of landscaped yards, mature trees, flowering bushes, old, elegant homes. Cloverdale, which is integrated today, speaks to the incongruence that is the life of Virginia Durr, a 92-year-old white woman and daughter of Montgomery's gentry who, with her husband, Clifford, was one of the few whites brave or committed or foolish enough to support Rosa Parks and the bus boycott. Her husband's law practice was nearly ruined, two of her daughters had to be sent to school up North, her yard was littered with obsence leaflets.

Mrs. Durr, a widow for 20 years, has been helped into the car from her small, white-clapboard retirement home. Her wheelchair is packed in the trunk. She is waiting for her friend and paid helper, Zecozy Williams, a 77-year-old black woman, to close up the house and climb in the car. Rather than talk in the house, Mrs. Durr prefers to go out for dinner. She has a huddled, little-old-lady look about her as she sits, her snowy hair swept up nicely, her hands smoothing the lap of her flowered skirt. But as she explains her choice of restaurant, her sing-song Southern voice carrying a pleasant archness, she doesn't sound like a little old lady.

''It's just that at certain restaurants you're more welcome than at others,'' she says, referring to Mrs. Williams. ''Certain places are white places and certain places are black places. And so when you find one that will welcome both, you're lucky.'' Mrs. Durr has selected the Sahara. ''They have black waiters . . . If they have black waiters, she's more comfortable than if they have white waiters.''

Has Mrs. Williams actually told her this?

Mr. Durr smiles benevolently. ''No, honey, I know it.''

On the night Rosa Parks was arrested, Eddie Mae Pratt, now 79 and a friend of a friend of Mrs. Parks, happened to be on the crowded bus. She was standing in the rear and couldn't see the commotion up front. Word filtered back that a black woman wouldn't give up her seat to a white. Mrs. Pratt, who knew Mrs. Parks from evenings she spent sewing clothing with Bertha T. Butler, Mrs. Pratt's neighbor, finally caught a glimpse of Mrs. Parks as she was led off the bus. Suddenly, she felt weak. She wrapped her arms around her chest and when the bus lurched forward, she slipped hard enough that a black man offered her his seat and she sat down.

''Do you feel all right?'' he asked.

''That's Mrs. Parks,'' she said, stunned.

At her stop, Mrs. Pratt ran to the nearby house of Bertha Bulter, who said, ''Oh, my goodness!'' She called the home of E.D. Nixon, the founder and former president of the Montgomery NAACP, where Mrs. Parks had been the volunteer secretary for 12 years. Nixon called Clifford Durr, who knew Mrs. Parks because, upon Nixon's recommendation, she had been doing seamstress work for Mrs. Durr. When Nixon drove by to pick up Clifford Durr, Mrs. Durr was with him and they went and bailed out Mrs. Parks.

Forty years later, at the Sahara, where Mrs. Durr is seated in her wheelchair at the table and Mrs. Williams is helping cut her entree, an old black waiter whispers to a young black waiter: ''That's Mrs. Durr, who went and got Rosa Parks out of jail.''

Mrs. Durr smiles. ''My claim to fame.''

That's not exactly true. Clifford Durr, who grew up in Montgomery, was a Rhodes scholar with a degree from Oxford University and a New Dealer whom Franklin Roosevelt had appointed to the Federal Communications Commission. After Clifford resigned to represent people charged as subversives in the communist witch hunts of the 1950s, the Durrs returned to their home town, where his family was the founder and owner of the prosperous Durr drugstore chain. Although politically conservative, the family supported Clifford and Virginia financially and gave him legal business. Then Virginia and Clifford were tarred as alleged communist sympathizers by U.S. Sen. James Eastland of Mississippi, whom an outraged Clifford publicly challenged to a fistfight. The Durrs were ostracized in elite Montgomery society, especially after it became known that Mrs. Durr was holding interracial women's prayer gatherings in their home. She once called to confirm a birthday party invitation sent to one of their daughters.

''Are you Clifford Durr's wife?'' a man asked.

''Yes.''

''Well, Mrs. Durr, no child of yours can enter this house.''

Through a New Deal acquaintance, Clifford met E.D. Nixon, who is perhaps the most unsung of Montgomery's civil rights heroes. He was a Pullman porter and the local head of A. Philip Randolph's powerful Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Nixon was close to Randolph, who in the '40s was already calling for massive grass-roots, demonstrations against Southern Jim Crow laws. Nixon himself had opened the local NAACP chapter in the 1920s. In Montgomery, Nixon was ''Mr. Civil Rights.'' He was rough-edged and poorly spoken, but he was an indefatigable man bravely willing to call public attention to the constant abuse of black people.

In those days, there was only one black lawyer in Montgomery. So when Nixon learned that Clifford Durr would take black clients, he sent them to him—no doubt also hoping to create a powerful white friend and ally. When Clifford mentioned that his wife needed a seamstress to alter the clothing their daughters received as hand-me-downs from rich relations—including Virginia's sister, the wife of former U.S. senator and then-Supreme Court Justice Hugo L. Black—Nixon sent Mrs. Parks, who had become a woman in the mold of the girl she had been.

Rosa Parks was pretty, with supple, tan skin and brown hair that ran to near her waist when it was down, but which in public was always braided and rolled in the fashion of Scarlett O'Hara in ''Gone With the Wind.'' She wore little makeup. She had a lovely smile and a gentle laugh, although folks can't remember her ever telling a joke or talking about a favorite movie. They can't remember her ever dancing or playing cards. She never gossiped, never seemed to get angry or even exasperated. She had flawless diction and elegant penmanship. Although she spoke little, she was gently assertive when she did, with a touch of music in her voice. He long silences weren't uncomfortable. She was a serene, placid woman whose quietness was easily mistaken for timidity.

''She was very much a lady,'' says Mrs. Durr, who has only nibbled at her dinner. ''The thing that makes it so interesting is that a lot of white women, they came down here after the Civil War and started a school, and she had gone to that school . . . staffed by white women, high-class women who came down to the South to be missionaries to the blacks.'' It was the Montgomery Industrial School for girls—dubbed Miss White's school after its headmistress, Alice L. White. Rosa's mother had sent her to live with Montgomery relatives so she could attend. Rosa cleaned classrooms to help pay her way. It's believed that Miss White's school got money from Sears, Roebuck & Co. chairman Julius Rosenwald, who funded schools for blacks all across the South. ''She came from good people and she had all the elements of a lady,'' Mrs. Durr says of Mrs. Parks. ''Neatness and order—just a lovely person.''

After dinner, Zecozy Williams packs Mrs. Durr's meal into a doggie box. Back at home, before she sits down to talk about Rosa Parks and the boycott, Mrs. Williams helps Mrs. Durr get comfortably situated in her living room on the couch beneath an oil painting of herself. While Mrs. Durr reads *Wallis and Edward*, the story of the prince of Wales and Wallis Warfield Simpson, Mrs. Williams goes to the dining room, sits in a large rose-colored wing chair and mends one of Mrs. Durr's bathrobes. She's getting Mrs. Durr ready for her summer trip to Martha's Vineyard. ''This is what Rosa did,'' Mrs. Williams says, laughing, her voice rich and deep and liquid. ''I'm doin' the same thing.''

Mrs. Williams didn't know Rosa Parks well. She, too, had moved to Montgomery from a country town, Hope Hull, Ala., but she was from a dirt-poor cropping family. As a teenager, she kept house for a white doctor in the country—cooked three meals a day, cleaned the house and did the laundry for $5 a week. She also carried eggs, 15 to 20 dozen, into Montgomery on horseback to sell. Then she started taking a bus into the city to do domestic work for $3 a day. It was hard for her to catch the bus on time, because her family didn't own a clock. In 1950, she and her husband moved to Montgomery.

One day, the woman doing her hair, Bertha Smith, asked if Mrs. Williams was a registered voter. ''I didn't know what that was. Really, I didn't.'' But soon she was attending voting clinics run by Rufus Lewis, a former teacher and football coach at what is today Alabama State University, Montgomery's historically black college. As the NAACP was E.D. Nixon's mission, voter registration was the mission of Rufus Lewis. The men were rival leaders, Lewis said to represent blacks teaching or educated at Alabama State and Nixon said to represent working people like himself. The saying was: Nixon had the ''masses'' and Lewis had the ''classes.'' Through Nixon, Zecozy Williams met Rosa Parks, who in 1943 had become the NAACP secretary in the footsteps of Johnnie Carr, a friend and fellow classmate from Miss White's school whose son would later become the test case that desegregated Montgomery's public schools. Before long, Mrs. Williams was helping Nixon and Lewis teach black folks how to pass the dreaded Alabama literacy test.

''I never did get afraid,'' Mrs. Williams says, even when she returned to Hope Hull and began registering blacks. Why? She doesn't know. She just put fear out of her mind, flicked a switch. After a while, she went to a white county politician and told him a new road was needed running out to the black schoolhouse.

''How many people you got registered?'' he asked.

''Well, we got quite a few.''

''Name some of 'em.''

She did.

Mrs. Williams stops sewing. ''And he made a road, ditched it on both sides.''She is still incredulous. ''And that was because of me. That was the first time I saw the power.''

In the early '50s, Mrs. Williams occasionally served at Mrs. Durr's parties. She was already the full-time domestic for Mr. Durr's sister and her husband, Stanhope Elmore. She liked the Elmores, but it was Mrs. Durr she admired. ''Mr. Elmore and them would talk about her,'' she says. ''She was an outcast. They never invited them over.'' But black people, whether or not they knew her personally, understood that Virginia Durr was putting her life and the lives of her family on the line. Mrs. Williams nods toward the old woman reading in the living room: ''Mrs. Durr is a brave woman.''

The East side of old black Montgomery isn't what it used to be. Alabama State still anchors the neighborhood, but many affluent blacks have migrated to the suburbs, where they now live among whites. Many doctors and lawyers, even public school teachers with two modest incomes have abandoned Montgomery's old black neighborhoods. But Rufus Lewis, 88 years old, a giant in the Montgomery civil rights movement, a man barely known outside his circle of aged contemporaries, still lives on the old black east side. He looks remarkably like the young, imperious Rufus Lewis, his head still kingly and dignified, with the bearing of an old, unbowed lion. But his mind is cloudy. He can't recall his past. He can't recall Rosa Parks.

Back in the '40s, Lewis became obsessed with black voting rights. Night after night, he traveled the countryside teaching blacks how to register. In Montgomery, he founded the Citizens Club, a private nightclub blacks could join only if they were registered voters. An entire generation of Montgomery blacks say Rufus Lewis is the reason they first voted. Lewis was the first to ramrod the Montgomery bus boycott's labyrinthine automobile transport system that helped get black boycotters back and forth every day for 13 months. Lewis, with Nixon's concurrence, nominated Martin Luther King Jr. to head the organization leading the boycott.

''Tell him as much as you remember, Daddy,'' says his 56-year-old daughter, Eleanor Dawkins. She sits in her father's knotty pine study with his old friend, a former mailman and present Montgomery City Council president, 73-year-old Joseph Dickerson. ''I thought that with Joe here,'' his daughter says, ''maybe there will be something that will come up.''

''Maybe,'' Mr. Lewis says tentatively.

''He believed,'' says Mr. Dickerson, who took part in five major European operations

in World War II, ''that if you go off to fight for your country, you oughta be able to vote in your country.''

Something stirs in Mr. Lewis. ''We got a lotta folks registered,'' he says, smiling. They mimeographed the literacy test, taught folks the answers, traveled by cover of night through the backwoods Jim Crow landscape, sent light-skinned blacks to the Montgomery registrar's office to learn if it was open that day, drove folks to the courthouse. When people failed the test—as they usually did the first time or two—Lewis and his workers did it all again, and then again. He stops talking, leans across the desk where he is sitting, fingers steepled, eyes blank, lost again.

Does Mr. Lewis know that history records his achievements?

''Well, that's fine to be remembered in the books,'' he says, suddenly firm and lucid, ''but the best part of it was being there to help the people who needed help . . . That was our job.''

The night Rosa Parks was arrested, E.D. Nixon and Clifford Durr recognized instinctively that Mrs. Parks was the vessel they'd been seeking to challenge the segregated bus laws. Other blacks had been arrested for defying those laws. Only months before, a 15-year-old girl, Claudette Colvin—inspired by a high school teacher's lectures on the need for equal rights, angered by the conviction of a black high school student for allegedly raping a white woman—had refused to give up her seat to a white, then resisted arrest when the police came. She kept hollering, ''It's my constitutional right!'' Nixon had decided against contesting her case: She had fought with police, she came from the poorer side of black Montgomery and, it was later learned, she was pregnant. He had also rejected the cases of several other women recently arrested, waiting for just the right vessel to arrive.

Then came Mrs. Parks. ''We got a lady can't nobody touch,'' Nixon said. There were other advantages. Rosa Parks, because of her well-mannered, serene demeanor, her proper speech, her humble, saintly way, her ascetic lifestyle—she didn't drink, smoke or curse—carried not only the image but the reality of the deserving Negro. Mrs. Parks had the qualities middle-class whites claimed in themselves and denied in blacks. Nothing about her supported the white contention that she deserved to be treated as inferior.

She had another advantage: Although whites may have viewed blacks as a single entity, the social class fissures within the black community—between educated and uneducated, affluent and poor—ran deep. Mrs. Parks bridged that gap: She was of ''working-class station and middle-class demeanor,'' as Taylor Branch wrote in Parting the Waters. She came from a good family, her relatives were prominent in Montgomery's St. Paul AME Church, she was educated at Miss White's and later Alabama State's lab school, and she had the manners—as Virginia Durr said—of a ''lady.'' In her role as NAACP secretary, she was respected by the city's educated activist community. But she was also a seamstress who earned $23 a week, whose fingers and feet were tired from honest work. She was a PR bonanza—with a bonus.

She was velvet hiding steel.

That night, after hushed conversations, Nixon and Clifford Durr asked if she would plead not guilty and fight her arrest in court. Nixon said they could take the case to the Supreme Court. Her husband, Raymond, a barber, was terrified, and Mrs. Durr later recalled in her memoir, Outside the Magic Circle, that he kept saying, ''Rosa, the white folks will kill you! Rosa, the white folks will kill you!'' Like a chant. Mrs. Parks was perfectly calm.

''I'll go along with you, Mr. Nixon.''

Her decision wasn't as simple as it seems, wasn't made in that one instant, but was a long time coming. In her 1992 autobiography, Rosa Parks: My Story, the source for many of the details about her life and attitudes, Mrs. Parks writes that as she sat on the bus, waiting for the police to arrive, she was thinking about the night as a girl when she sat with her grandfather, shotgun at the ready, while the KKK rode the countryside. The humiliating segregation of Montgomery's buses was much on her mind. Not only had Claudette Colvin's arrest occurred last spring, but just a month earlier, a bus driver had ordered Mrs. Parks's dear friend, Bertha Butler, to move back to make room for a white man: ''You sit back there with the niggers.'' Mrs. Butler was a woman raising two children on her own, who also worked as a seamstress, who sometimes sewed until 5 a.m. for extra income and who still found time to run voter clinics in her home two nights a week. She had befriended Mrs. Parks because she so admired her civil rights work. Mrs. Butler didn't move at the order, and the standing white man, in soldier's uniform, had intervened: ''That's your seat and you sit there.'' Mrs. Butler, now retired at age 76 and living near Philadelphia, was glad she wasn't the one to get arrested. ''God looked at me and said I wasn't strong enough,'' he says. ''Mrs. Parks was the person.''

At the time Mrs. Parks was arrested, she was in the process of rejuvenating the NAACP's youth organization, getting ready for a conference in a few days. Only the summer before, at the behest of Virginia Durr, Mrs. Parks had spent 10 days at the interracial Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, a labor organizing camp that had turned its radical eye on civil rights. Mrs. Parks loved waking up in the morning at Highlander, smelling the bacon and eggs cooking—and knowing it was white people fixing breakfast for her. She returned home, Mrs. Durr later said, inspired at realizing that whites and blacks could live as equals and even more disgusted with segregation. One of Highlander's most famous black teachers, Septima Clark, said later, ''Rosa Parks was afraid for white people to know that she was as militant as she was.''

Mrs. Parks had been training her high school charges in the ways of civil disobedience. Mrs. Butler's 58-year-old daughter, Zynobia Tatum, remembers saying to Mrs. Parks, ''They are going to hit me, spit on me and call me names, and I can't fight back? I cannot promise you.'' Mrs. Parks told Zynobia she needed more training. Already, Mrs. Parks had sent her youth group members into the whites-only public library to order books. Zynobia Tatum recalls that she and Mrs. Parks had often taken drinks from whites-only water fountains downtown—''to show our disapproval.'' After Claudette Colvin's arrest for refusing to give up her seat, Claudette joined Mrs. Parks' group—and Mrs. Parks discovered she was the great-granddaughter of the dark-skinned black man in Pine Level who had refused to work for whites, the man young Rosa had secretly admired. It was almost prophetic.

Despite her genuine gentleness and pragmatic faith in the tactic of civil disobedience, Rosa Parks was never entirely comfortable with the philosophy of nonviolence and the idea that if black people were attacked, they shouldn't fight back. In an obscure 1967 interview on file at Howard University she said bluntly, ''I don't believe in gradualism or that whatever is to be done for the better should take forever to do.''

For more than a decade as NAACP secretary, she had watched case after case of injustice against blacks come through the NAACP office, almost all of which she was powerless to change. She'd worked with a group trying to save the life of the young Montgomery man convicted of raping a white woman—the case that had so outraged Claudette Colvin—only to see him executed. She knew the widow and three small children of a black man who, in his U.S. military uniform, was shot dead by police after he supposedly caused a scene on a Montgomery bus. She had told local NAACP board member Frank Bray, now 75, that someone needed to do something to break the fist of segregation, even if it meant a sacrifice.

''I had no idea,'' he says, ''that she would be the sacrificial lamb . . . She'd say. These folks have all these beautiful churches and they profess to be Christians and yet they have businesses where the clerks are not courteous and where you cannot use a restroom and if you drink water you have to drink out of the little spigot that was added to the main fountain' . . . Most blacks resented the conditions and many of them adjusted to it and many did not adjust. She did not adjust.'' After her arrest, Mrs. Parks revealed to fellow boycott worker Hazel Gregory, now 75, that she had thought about refusing to give up her seat in the past.

Montgomery whites claimed that her arrest was part of a plot, that Nixon had put his longtime secretary up to it. No evidence supports that claim. On the night of her arrest, Nixon was shocked and confused, flailing about in his effort to get her released. It is embedded in the American psyche that Rosa Parks acted on the spur of the moment, and her arrest is often called the ''spark'' that ignited the modern civil rights movement. In fact, Rosa Park's act and the firestorm that followed were more like spontaneous combustion—a fire ignited by the buildup of heat over time in material ripe for explosion. Mrs. Parks, who wasn't afraid as she waited for her arrest, who felt oddly serene, revealed the lifetime thread of experiences that had led to her action when the police arrived and asked once more if she would move. In the way of the Bible, she answered with a question:

''Why do you all push us around?''

No moral philosopher, the cop said, ''I don't know.''

Then she was led away.

Years later, Edward Warren Boswell, now 41, the son of a cousin Mrs. Parks grew up with in Pine Level, asked her why she refused to move that particular day. ''She said she had no idea,'' he recalls. His 44-year-old sister, Betty Boswell, says, ''She said she was just tired from working, and they had always been harassing black people about not sitting to the front and she said that particular day she just wasn't in the mood . . . Her feet were hurting.'' Mrs. Parks told Edward: ''It was just set in motion by God.''

Back in the study of Rufus Lewis, City Council President Joe Dickerson agrees. But he, like Mrs. Parks and almost everybody else who was involved in the boycott, was of the praise-the-Lord-and-pass-the-ammunition school of religion. Every inch of progress was a battle. White politicians tried to break the boycott in court, and the boycott leaders fought back in court. The white thugs bombed four churches and the homes of King, Nixon and Ralph Abernathy, a young minister in Montgomery at the time. As Zecozy William said, people risked their lives.

Theirs was an eerie determination. King later wrote that he was increasingly afraid until late one night when he felt the presence and the resoluteness of God descend upon him. Mrs. Williams said she flicked a mental switch to turn off her fear. Mrs. Parks described her serenity as she waited to be arrested. And now, Mr. Dickerson compares his state of mind during the dangerous

days of the boycott to the way he felt the night before a military operation in World War II: ''Gotta go.''

Mr. Dickerson: ''It's a miracle.''

Mr. Lewis: ''I just feel grateful that we came through.''

The room is like Inez Baskin's private museum. The large portrait of her grandfather stands on an easel. In his bow tie and vest, with his mustache and slicked-back hair, he looks every bit an Irishman. The photo of her mother and father, so fair-skinned, sits on the piano encased in plastic wrap for protection. ''My husband's father was white, too,'' she says. And of course, on the wall, is the famous photo of Mrs. Baskin, now 79 years old, on the day that bus segregation ended in Montgomery: Mrs. Baskin, Abernathy, King and two others riding a bus. The photo ran worldwide and Inez Baskin, a reporter for the ''colored page'' of the Montgomery Advertiser and a correspondent for Jet magazine and the Pittsburgh Courier, was mistaken by many for Rosa Parks, still is today.

''In the '50s, I didn't have *any* sense,'' she says, sitting in a large, comfortable chair amid her memorabilia. She softly rubs her face, plays with the ring on her left hand. Her long gray hair sweeps over from the right, dangling in a single braid to her left. She speaks softly and deliberately. ''I thought I could walk on water in those days.'' With a black photographer, she once raced out to Prattville, Ala., after a report that the Klan was burning a cross. The crowd was gone, but the cross was still burning. She laughs and shakes her head at the memory. A photo ran in Jet.

Did she know Rosa Parks?

She smiles faintly. ''An angel walking.''

''I wonder sometimes what it would have taken just to make her act like the rest of us . . . She would smile, *very* demure, and never raise her voice. She was just different in a very angelic way . . . 'If you can walk with kings and not lose the common touch.' Those are the kind of expressions that come to mind when you think about Rosa Parks. My great-grandmother had an expression for it: 'living on earth and boarding in Glory.'''

Mrs. Baskin believes Mrs. Parks was heaven-sent?

''She *had* to be.''

On the night Rosa Parks was arrested, after she had agreed to become bus segregation's test case, 24-year-old Fred Gray, one of Montgomery's two black attorneys then, arrived home late from out of town and got the word. Gray has grown up in Montgomery, attended Alabama State and gone to Ohio for law school because Alabama didn't have a law school for blacks. When the state required five attorneys to sign character affidavits before he could practice, Gray had gone to E.D. Nixon, who helped him find the lawyers. One of them was Clifford Durr. Gray had returned home with one goal—to ''destroy everything segregated.'' Mrs. Parks immediately offered her services. Every day, she came to his downtown office at lunch, answered his mail for free, encouraged his idealism. They talked not only about the buses, but inferior black schools, segregated parks, swimming pools and toilets. In his memoir, *Bus Ride to Justice*, Gray, now 64, later wrote, ''She gave me the feeling that I was the Moses that God had sent to Pharaoh.''

Fred Gray upped the ante. Late on the night Mrs. Parks was arrested, he visited Jo Ann Robinson, an Alabama State professor and president of the Women's Political Council, a group composed of female university professors, public school teachers, nurses, social workers and the wives of Montgomery's black professional men. For months, Robinson had been laying plans for a bus boycott. Although she and most of Montgomery's affluent blacks owned cars and didn't ride the buses often, she had taken a bus to the airport in 1949 and mistakenly sat in a white seat. The driver went wild, screamed, threatened. ''I felt like a dog,'' she later said.

Every black person who rode a bus had a tale to tell: the man who paid his last coin in fare only to have the bus drive off before he could return and enter through the back door, the woman who was attacked when she stepped onto a bus to pay ahead of a white man, the pregnant woman who fell when a bus pulled away as she stepped off. In 1953 alone, the Women's Council had received 30 complaints from black bus riders.

It was a unifying indignity.

Inspired by the Supreme Court ruling that had banned ''separate but equal'' schools in 1954, Robinson had even written the mayor and warned that if black riders weren't treated more courteously ''twenty-five or more local organizations'' were planning a bus boycott. It was a hopeful time. Already, a boycott in Baton Rouge, La., organized by the Rev. T.J. Jemison, had won concessions for black riders in that city. And in Little Rock, Ark., officials had devised a plan to integrate its schools. But nothing had come of Robinson's demands. Then Fred Gray dropped by.

At midnight, Robinson went to Alabama State and furtively used its government-owned paper and mimeograph machines to run off 52,500 leaflets announcing a boycott of Montgomery's buses on the day of Mrs. Parks's trial. The next morning, Robinson and her Women's Council cohorts and students distributed the leaflets to black schools, stores, taverns, beauty parlors and barber shops. When Alabama State's black president, H. Councill Trenholm, who served at the pleasure of the Alabama governor, learned of her action, he called her into his office and demanded an explanation. She told him another black woman had been humiliated on a bus; she promised to pay for the mimeograph paper. He calmed down, warned her to work behind the scenes. Trenholm's wife, too, was a Women's Council member.

The rest is history. Rosa Parks was found guilty and fined $10, plus $4 in court costs. To keep the followers of Rufus Lewis and E.D. Nixon from squabbling, King became the compromise choice to lead the boycott. When black preachers cozy with Montgomery's powerful whites balked at the idea, Nixon, in his rugged way, questioned their manhood: ''You ministers have lived off these wash-women for the last hundred years and ain't never done nothing for them.'' After Nixon's taunt, King himself said, ''Brother Nixon, I'm not a coward.'' Nixon planted the story of the boycott with a friendly white reporter at the Montgomery Advertiser. It became front-page news and announced the boycott to every black in Montgomery.

There were bombings, threats, lawsuits, harassing phone calls. Victory was not preordained; it came a day at a time. The city's stubborn refusal to compromise on bus seating—other segregated Southern cities didn't have specific seats reserved only for whites—probably hardened the resolve of the boycotters. The bombings certainly turned national public opinion against the segregationists. In 1956, young Fred Gray successfully took his argument against Montgomery's bus segregation to the U.S. Supreme Court. Although many people believe it was Rosa Parks's case that went before the high court, Gray actually didn't use her as a plaintiff because of technicalities in her case that might have undermined his federal lawsuit. Instead, five women whose names are mostly lost to history filed suit; Aurelia Browder, Claudette Colvin, Susie McDonald, Jeanetta Reese and Mary Louise Smith.

Victory had a price; Jo Ann Robinson and about a dozen other activist ASU employees lost their jobs. Monroe J. Gardner, whose granddaughter is now a federal magistrate in Montgomery, used his car to transport people during the boycott. He was beaten. Samuel Patton Sr., a boycott supporter and prominent builder, lost his line of bank credit. E.L. and Dorothy Posey, who ran the only black-owned parking lot in downtown Montgomery, let their lot be used as a transit staging point. After the boycott, they lost their business. Anne Smith Pratt volunteered dispatching cars to pick up waiting riders. Her marriage ended when her husband was sent overseas and she refused to leave her post. Not to mention the hardships endured by thousands of working class blacks who walked miles to work every day in the heat, the cold, the rain. Says sociologist Aldon Morris, ''People made this happen.''

During the boycott, Rosa Parks helped run the auto dispatch system. She wasn't a leader of the movement, and didn't try to be. She traveled the country raising money. Already, she was a symbol. When she, King and nearly 100 others were charged with conspiracy during the boycott, a photo of her being fingerprinted ran on the front page of the New York Times—perhaps because King was out of town and not available to be photographed. That picture, mistakenly believed by many to have been taken the night she was first arrested, became a piece of movement iconography.

As the historic significance of the boycott became clearer, as journalists poured in from all over the world, bickering began over the credit. Nixon became jealous of not only King but Rosa Parks. ''If it hadn't been for me . . .'' he told Mrs. Park's friend Hazel Gregory. In one of the final recorded interviews of his life in 1988, Nixon told local amateur historian Riley Lewis Jr., ''We had court cases that had been filed 10 years 'fore Mrs. Parks was arrested . . . King didn't make the Montgomery bus boycott—me, the peoples and our protest made him!''

He was right. He was wrong.

Everybody made everybody.

Inez Baskin still marvels about those days. ''It was as if I was out of myself doing these things.'' she says, sitting forward in her chair, holding her arms before her and gently swaying, eyes closed. ''Not myself, but more myself than ever. It didn't seem as if it was me doing it . . . It was as if we were out of ourselves, watching ourselves . . . Not in our bodies.

''Does that make any sense?''

IT IS THE HANDS of Rosa Parks that you notice. They are always folded somehow, plaited together so naturally, the left hand lying open on her lap, the right hand's palm lying open over it, her thumb softly massaging her wrist. Or the fingers gently intertwined, her thumbs methodically crossing and recrossing. Or the left palm held open and facing up, the right palm grazing lightly back and forth over its surface. Hands always at rest, always at work.

Rosa Parks is visiting Montgomery today, traveling with a bus tour of youngsters retracing the path of the underground railroad from the South to Canada, stopping at important civil rights sites along the way. The Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development sponsors the tour, which is filled mostly with youths from the Washington and Detroit areas. Mrs. Parks has returned to Montgomery only occasionally since 1957 when she, her husband and her mother moved to Detroit, where her brother lived. She and her husband had lost their jobs and the phone jangled constantly with vicious threats: ''You should be killed.'' Her

brother was afraid for them and insisted they move to Detroit, where Mrs. Parks eventually worked for Democratic Rep. John Conyers Jr. as a receptionist and caseworker. She retired in 1988. Her husband, mother and brother are all dead. She is 82.

In cities where she was once despised, she is now treated like royalty—or more. Yesterday in Birmingham, siren-blaring motorcycle cops stopped traffic for her and the mayor proclaimed it ''Rosa Parks Day.'' At the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, Mrs. Parks stood quietly looking at a life-sized sculpture of herself sitting on the bus, purse in her lap, staring out the window, waiting to be arrested. Watching her watch herself was an army of TV crews and cameras. In Selma, a woman reached out, took hold of her challis dress and said, ''I want to touch the hem of your garment.'' Unchanged in manner since 1955, Mrs. Parks said, ''That's very nice.'' Today in Montgomery, she is given the key to the city and a speaker introduces her by saying, ''Why don't we just get on our feet and greet our mother, Rosa Parks!''

The mother of the civil rights movement.

''A saint of American history,'' a TV reporter calls her.

''I don't consider myself a saint,'' says Mrs. Parks, who still wears her hair braided and rolled behind her head, still speaks so softly her voice is nearly inaudible, still is velvet hiding steel. ''I'm just a person who wanted to be seated on the bus.''

But again and again, Rosa Parks tells audiences she didn't remain in her seat because she was physically weary. No, she was weary of the injustice. Again and again, she mentions that she was working at the NAACP before her arrest. No, she didn't plan her arrest, but her whole life from childhood was leading up to it. Without being asked, she is responding to the mythic tale that, ironically, holds her up to worship *and* diminishes her: *the simple seamstress, the meek Negro woman, exhausted from a day's work, who without forethought chose to sit her ground.*

Rosa Parks doesn't really answer questions put to her later, questions about why she is often seen as a simple seamstress rather than as an assertive activist, questions about whether her sainthood status diminishes her status as a strong, committed woman. ''I was always glad that the people did have the determination to make the sacrifices and take that action,'' she says in her soft, slow voice. ''I just felt that as a person I didn't want to be treated like a second-class citizen. I didn't want to mistreated under the guise of legally enforced racial segregation and that the more we endured that kind of treatment, the worse we were being treated . . . I consider myself a symbol of freedom and equality, and I wanted to let it be known that that was what I believed in.''

It is as simple—and complex—as that.

''She remains a pure symbol,'' says University of Georgia sociologist Gary Fine, an expert in political symbolism. ''For everyone today and in the '50s, it was a text story with only one possible reading—this poor woman who refused to move to the back of the bus. What possible explanation could you possibly have for making her move? It was so transparently egregious.'' But for a symbol to have 40 years of staying power, Fine says, it must carry a deeper cultural resonance about ''our own self-image.''

''By protecting this image we are celebrating core values for ourselves as Americans,'' he says. ''There is a universal consensus now that integration is good. She symbolizes this now. Everybody on all sides can use her.'' For blacks, she is evidence that they forced change. For whites, she is evidence that they were willing to change.

Rosa Parks as proof: America is good.

''The beauty was that she disappeared from the scene,'' says Fine, meaning that her later behavior or opinions didn't muddy the purity of her symbolism, as happened with King after allegations of plagiarism and marital infidelity. ''She did her duty as a symbol and then disappeared except for ceremonial events.''

Back in Montgomery, Mrs. Parks is standing amid the adoration, her hands plaited naturally on the lectern, giving a short tale: She's glad for all the change but more change is needed, the struggle for justice must go on, the greatest power is God. Then, so softly that people must strain to hear, she recites a hymn her mother sang to her as a child in Pine Level:

''O freedom,
O freedom,
O freedom over me.
And before I'd be a slave,
I'd be buried in my grave,
And go home to my Lord and be free.''

''I'd like for everybody to remember me as a person who wanted to be free.''

It is night and Joe Dickerson, the city council president, is standing before bus No. 5726, lit by the headlights of his car. Mr. Dickerson helped get the bus hauled here in hopes that the committee set up to honor the 40th anniversary of the boycott can eventually collect enough private donations to restore it. The Montgomery City Council, with four blacks and five whites, isn't yet ready to foot the whole bill or to finance the civil rights museum Mr. Dickerson would like to see built inside the old Empire Theater, outside of which Rosa Parks was arrested.

But someday . . .

''If you rode the bus, you were mistreated,'' Mr. Dickerson says, the light making him look washed and vague and mysterious in his little hat with the brim rolled up all the way around. And so the time was right. It could have been anybody . . . I guess when the time is right, it's just like Nelson Mandela. If anybody had told Mandela, 'You're gonna be free and you're gonna rule South Africa, man,' you talked like a fool. 'I'm not gonna get outta jail!' So there is a time for everything. And you have to play your role.''

Rosa Parks's grandfather who refused to shuffle for whites played his role. So did the dark-skinned man in Pine Level who wouldn't work for whites. Rosa's mother, who sacrificed so Rosa could go to Miss White's school. Miss White. Julius Rosenwald. A. Philip Randolph. The NAACP lawyers who laid decades of groundwork for the 1954 Supreme Court schools decision. The Rev. T.J. Jemison, who organized the earlier Baton Rouge bus boycott. Those who took the literacy test again and again. Raymond Parks. H. Councill Trenholm, Ralph Abernathy, Eddie Mae Pratt, Anne Smith Pratt, E.L. and Dorothy Posey, Zecozy Williams, Bertha Smith, Monroe J. Gardner, Samuel Patton Sr., Johnnie Carr, Bertha T. Butler, Zynobia Tatum, Aurelia Browder, Claudette Colvin, Susie McDonald, Jeanetta Reese, Mary Louise Smith. And, of course, E.D. Nixon, Rufus Lewis, Jo Ann Robinson, Fred Gray, Clifford and Virginia Durr and Martin Luther King Jr., who transformed a demand for seats into a mission for God. And the 40,000 who refused to ride.

Strands in a thread.

Rosa Parks, too, played her role.

She still does.

''The message is ordinary people doing extraordinary things,'' says sociologist Aldon Morris, who fears that the simplified mythology that enshrouds Rosa Parks and the Montgomery bus boycott, the belief that it was all God-ordained, can obscure the determination, fearlessness and skilled organization of the people who made the movement. ''To believe that King or Rosa Parks are heroes, it creates passivity . . . Young people then ask, ''Where's the new Martin Luther King?' . . . People don't understand that power exists within the collectivity.''

''The peoples,'' as E.D. Nixon said.

Back at the bus, bathed in the vague and mysterious light, Joe Dickerson says, ''Things are changing.''

Someday they'll have that museum.

''When the time is right.''

And bus No. 5726 will be waiting.